Accreditation Manual

Section I
General Information
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## SECTION 1 - GENERAL INFORMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table of Contents</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits of Accreditation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy of Accreditation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of Nursing Accreditation</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products and Services</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACEN Organizational Structure</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Commission</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Structure of the Commission</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board of Commissioners</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-2013 ACEN Board of Commissioners</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACEN Staff</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation Standards and Criteria for Academic Quality of Postsecondary and Higher Degree Programs in Nursing</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACEN Definition of Quality</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACEN Accreditation Standards</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Standards and Criteria in the Evaluation of Nursing Education Units</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation Processes and Procedures</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning for Accreditation</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidacy Process</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Accreditation</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing Accreditation</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Process</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Assistance</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Review and Self-Study Report</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Site Visit</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Nursing Programs Within a Nursing Education Unit</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative and Coordinated Site Visits With Other Agencies</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Visit</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment of Site Visit Team</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Chairperson</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibilities of the Team Chairperson</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibilities of the Team Members</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibilities of the Nursing Education Unit</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit Arrangements</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agenda for the Visit</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting Off-Site Location(s) of the Nursing Program</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Site Visitors' Report</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACEN Staff Review</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Review Panel</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing Program Representative Attendance at the Evaluation Review Panel Meeting</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commission</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Evaluators</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligibility for Selection as a Program Evaluator</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Visitor</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Review Panel Member</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appeal Panel Member</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

MISSION
The Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) supports the interests of nursing education, nursing practice, and the public by the functions of accreditation. Accreditation is a voluntary, self-regulatory process by which non-governmental associations recognize educational institutions or programs that have been found to meet or exceed standards and criteria for educational quality. Accreditation also assists in the further improvement of the institutions or programs as related to resources invested, processes followed, and results achieved. The monitoring of certificate, diploma, and degree offerings is tied closely to state examination and licensing rules and to the oversight of preparation for work in the profession.

PURPOSE
The purpose of the ACEN is to provide specialized accreditation for programs of nursing education, both postsecondary and higher degree, which offer either a certificate, a diploma, or a recognized professional degree (clinical doctorate, master’s, baccalaureate, associate, diploma, and practical).

GOALS
The goals of the ACEN are to:
- Promulgate a common core of standards and criteria for the accreditation of nursing programs.
- Strengthen educational quality through assistance to associated nursing education units by evaluation processes, functions, publications, and research.
- Advocate self-regulation in nursing education.
- Promote peer review.
- Foster educational equity, access, opportunity, mobility, and preparation for employment based upon type of nursing education.
- Serve as gatekeeper to Title IV-HEA programs for which the ACEN is the accrediting agency. (These include some practical nursing and all hospital diploma programs eligible to participate in programs administered by the U.S. Department of Education or other federal agencies.)
RECOGNITION
The Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing is recognized as the accrediting body for all types of nursing education by:

- United States Department of Education (USDOE)
- United States Uniformed Nursing Services (USUNS)
- Veterans Health Administration, Department of Veteran Affairs (VHA)
- National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN)
- State Boards of Nurse Examiners (SBNE)
- Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)
- Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA)
- Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)
- United States Department of Health and Human Services, Bureau of Health Professions, Division of Nursing (USHHS)
- National Certification Corporation for the Obstetric, Gynecologic and Neonatal Nursing Specialties (NCC)
- Employers

National, regional, and specialized accreditors that oversee federal funding eligibility must be reviewed by the United States Department of Education (USDOE) to ensure that the accrediting body meets specific standards established by Congress. The Secretary, of Education, U.S. Department of Education is charged with review of accrediting bodies and providing recognition to those accrediting agencies that meet the Secretary of Education’s criteria. Students in institutions or programs accredited by a USDOE-recognized agency are eligible for federal financial aid assistance and other needed resources.

The ACEN also meets the recognition standards of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). CHEA, a non-governmental organization, recognizes regional, specialized, and professional accrediting bodies to ensure quality, accountability, and improvement in higher education. Additionally, the NCC has added ACEN accreditation as an eligibility requirement for individuals seeking advanced practice certification.

BENEFITS OF ACCREDITATION
ACEN accreditation is a voluntary peer review process intended to enhance quality improvement in nursing education. Accreditation:

- Provides recognition that a nursing education program has been evaluated and periodically re-evaluated by a qualified, independent group of respected and competent peers who have found it to be meeting appropriate postsecondary and higher educational purposes in a satisfactory manner.
- Assures professional development opportunity and validation for faculty.
- Is a gateway to licensure, certification, and eligibility for entitlement programs.
- Identifies areas needing development.
- Fosters ongoing self-examination, re-evaluation, and focus on the future.
- Aids in student recruitment and retention.
• Assists employers seeking graduates who are competent nurses.
• Facilitates career and education decision-making.
• Promotes professional and educational mobility of program graduates.
• Enables student eligibility for funding support from federal and state agencies, and foundations for those programs that do not have regional or national accreditation.
• Fulfills the eligibility requirement for applicants seeking advanced certification.

PHILOSOPHY OF ACCREDITATION

The ACEN accreditation program is founded on the belief that specialized accreditation contributes to the centrality of nursing for the public good and provides for the maintenance and enhancement of educational quality through continuous self-assessment, planning, and improvement. Accreditation indicates to the general public and to the educational community that a nursing program has clear and appropriate educational objectives and is working to achieve these objectives. Emphasis is placed upon the total nursing program and its compliance with established standards and criteria in the context of its mission/philosophy as well as current and future nursing practice.

Accrediting agencies share responsibility with faculty and clinicians for the development of accreditation standards, criteria, policies, and procedures for participation in accreditation and review of accreditation processes.

The ACEN supports the continuation and strengthening of voluntary specialized accreditation by peers as a principal means of public accountability and ongoing improvement. Specialized accreditation sets standards for programs and ensures, through the self-study process and accreditation review, the promotion of effective education and program improvement. Because the nursing education unit analysis is closely related to the governing organization itself, ACEN activities will, when possible, be coordinated with other officially recognized regional and specialized accrediting bodies.

Standards and criteria for accreditation, materials that document compliance, policies, and procedures are based on principles widely accepted and tested in general and professional education. All those involved in the process must be aware of current developments in education and nursing; the effectiveness of the current standards, criteria, policies, and procedures; and the evidence of need for change. A systematic ongoing review of all components of the accreditation process is essential to ensure an up-to-date, reliable, and valid accrediting process.
**HISTORY OF NURSING ACCREDITATION**

1893 The American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses, forerunner of the National League for Nursing, was founded for the purpose of establishing and maintaining a universal standard of training for nurses.

1917 The National League of Nursing Education published Standard of Curriculum for Schools of Nursing.

1920 Accrediting activities in nursing education were begun by many different organizations.

1937 The National League of Nursing Education published A Curriculum Guide for Schools of Nursing, the last of its type by the organization.

1938 The National League of Nursing Education initiated accreditation for programs of nursing education for registered nursing.

1949 The National Nursing Accrediting Service was formed for the purpose of unifying accreditation activities in nursing. It was discontinued in 1952 when accreditation activities were consolidated under the National League for Nursing.

1952 The U.S. Department of Education recognized the National League for Nursing (NLN) and included it on the initial list of recognized accrediting agencies. NLN (later NLNAC) has been continually recognized by the U.S. Department of Education since this date.

1958 The NLN Board of Directors established a policy charging each educational council with the responsibility for developing its own accreditation program. The program was conducted through the three NLN membership units: the Council of Baccalaureate and Higher Degree Programs; the Council of Diploma and Associate Degree Programs; (the Diploma and Associate Degree Programs separated into two councils in 1965); and the Council of Practical Nursing Programs (1966). The accreditation program and services were administered by NLN professional staff.

1964 Federal funding for nursing education under the Nurse Training Act was contingent upon the compliance of schools of nursing with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

1977 The Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA) recognized the NLN Accreditation Program.

1991 Outcome criteria were incorporated into Standards and Criteria for all accredited programs.

1995 The NLN Board of Governors approved the recommendation of the NLN Accreditation Committee to institute core standards and criteria.

1996 The NLN Board of Governors approved establishment of an independent entity within the organization to be known as the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission (NLNAC).

1997 The NLNAC, now the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN), began operations with sole authority and accountability for carrying out the responsibilities inherent in the accreditation processes.

Fifteen (15) Commissioners were appointed: nine (9) nurse educators, three (3) nursing service representatives, and three (3) public members. The Commissioners assumed responsibilities for the management, financial decisions, policy making, and general administration of the NLNAC.

The peer review process was strengthened with the formation of program specific Evaluation Review Panels.
1998 The NLNAC continued collaborative work with specialty organizations to strengthen application of standards for advanced practice nursing programs. Advanced practice nurses were invited to serve as clinicians on the site visit teams.


2000 The NLNAC received continuing recognition by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

2001 The NLNAC was incorporated as a subsidiary of the National League for Nursing.


2005 The NLNAC received continuing recognition by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).


2013 The name of the Commission was changed to the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN).

PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

- Initial accreditation and continuing accreditation of approximately 175 nursing programs per year
- Continuous monitoring of more than 1,200 programs per year
- **ACEN Accreditation Manual**
  - Clinical Doctorate Programs
  - Master's /Post-Master's Certificate Programs
  - Baccalaureate Programs
  - Associate Programs
  - Diploma Programs
  - Practical Programs
- **ACEN Directory of Accredited Nursing Programs (electronic database)**
- **Bridges** (Quarterly Electronic Newsletter)
- Forums/Workshops
  - Self-Study
  - Program Evaluator
  - New Nurse Administrator
- Candidacy
- Mentoring by Professional Staff
- **Report to Constituents**
  - Analysis of ACEN Annual Reports
  - Analysis of accreditation cycles
- ACEN website: [www.acenursing.org](http://www.acenursing.org)
ACEN ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

THE COMMISSION

OVERALL STRUCTURE OF THE COMMISSION

The ACEN is governed by a fifteen-member Board of Commissioners. The Commissioners who are elected by the representatives of ACEN-accredited nursing programs. The legal basis for the foundation and structure of the Commission is outlined in the Bylaws and the Articles of Incorporation. The ACEN is incorporated under the laws of the state of New York.

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

- Nine (9) Commissioners are nurse educators representing ACEN-accredited programs, three (3) Commissioners represent the public, and three (3) Commissioners represent nursing service.
- Commissioners are diversified and assure balanced representation from across identified constituencies insofar as possible.
- No Governor, officer, or employee of the National League for Nursing or employee of the ACEN may serve as a Commissioner.
- The Board of Commissioners sets accreditation policy and makes accreditation, administrative, budget, and policy decisions.
- Commissioners serve as chairpersons of the program-specific Evaluation Review Panels.
- Decision of accreditation status is made by the Commissioners, based on review of program materials, the Site Visitors' Report, and the recommendation of the Evaluation Review Panel.
### 2012-2013 ACEN BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

#### GENERAL INFORMATION

**ACEN Accreditation Manual**

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

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#### NURSING EDUCATION REPRESENTATIVES

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Position/Role</th>
<th>Institution/Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mary Lou Rusin, EdD, RN, ANEF</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Position/Role</th>
<th>Institution/Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Treasurer, ACEN</td>
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#### PUBLIC REPRESENTATIVES

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<thead>
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<th>Position/Role</th>
<th>Institution/Location</th>
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ACEN Accreditation Manual
GENERAL INFORMATION

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ACCREDITATION STANDARDS AND CRITERIA FOR ACADEMIC QUALITY OF POSTSECONDARY AND HIGHER DEGREE PROGRAMS IN NURSING

ACEN DEFINITION OF QUALITY

The core values of accreditation emphasize learning, community, responsibility, integrity, value, quality, and continuous improvement through reflection and analysis. They require the nursing program to measure itself by exacting standards, honor high aspiration and achievement, and expect all persons associated with the program to recognize their responsibility to provide a supportive and humane environment in which people interact with each other in a spirit of cooperation, openness, and mutual respect.

Accreditation standards are agreed-upon rules to measure quantity, extent, value, and quality. Criteria are statements that identify the variables that need to be examined in evaluation of a standard. The ACEN Criteria are presented to peer reviewers as statements that represent an accurate description of an accredited program.

Peer review is a long-established and effective component of program evaluation in educational settings. It is used to help determine which programs to accredit. Peer reviewers know the current thinking in the various program types, know the curriculum rules and conventions, and are trained to identify program compliance with Standards and Criteria.

Program-specific expertise is preserved at the point of criteria documentation, program evaluation conducted by peers from like programs at the time of the site visit, during Evaluation Review Panel deliberations, and upon appeal.

Quality in education ensures high levels of opportunity for student learning and achievement. Accreditation is an affirmation of values central to thinking about postsecondary and higher education: appropriate mission, organizational structures, processes, and functions; resources aligned with core values; collegiality; and continuous self-improvement.

The ACEN accredits all types of nursing education programs in a variety of postsecondary and higher education settings including vocational-technical agencies, hospitals, proprietary schools, professional schools, seminaries, colleges, universities, and other institutions that offer diplomas, certificates, and/or academic degrees.
ACEN ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

**STANDARD 1**
Mission and Administrative Capacity

The nursing education unit’s mission reflects the governing organization’s core values and is congruent with its strategic goals and objectives. The governing organization and program have administrative capacity resulting in effective delivery of the nursing program and achievement of identified outcomes.

**STANDARD 2**
Faculty and Staff

Qualified faculty and staff provide leadership and support necessary to attain the goals and outcomes of the nursing education unit.

**STANDARD 3**
Students

Student policies, development, and services support the goals and outcomes of the nursing education unit.

**STANDARD 4**
Curriculum

The curriculum prepares students to achieve the outcomes of the nursing education unit, including safe practice in contemporary health care environments.

**STANDARD 5**
Resources

Fiscal, physical, and learning resources promote the achievement of the goals and outcomes of the nursing education unit.

**STANDARD 6**
Outcomes

Evaluation of student learning demonstrates that graduates have achieved identified competencies consistent with the institutional mission and professional standards and that the outcomes of the nursing education unit have been achieved.

UNDERSTANDING STANDARDS AND CRITERIA IN THE EVALUATION OF NURSING EDUCATION UNITS

The singular function of nursing is the improvement of the human condition. Each certificate, diploma, or degree has an identifiable, discrete set of specific outcomes. Postsecondary and higher education provide for the development of learners’ ability to think for themselves, master analytical problem-solving, apply scientific knowledge, and make value judgments within the context of the specific program type. Thus, education requires a broad academic orientation and depth and breadth of intellectual skills translated into competencies so as to fulfill nursing’s functions in all types of nursing.

**Standards** are the agreed-upon rules for the measurement of quantity, extent, value, and quality.

**Criteria** are statements that identify the variables that need to be examined in evaluation of a standard.
Accreditation Standards and Criteria become effective on the Commission approval date. Programs scheduled for review within twelve (12) months of revision of the Standards and Criteria may elect to use the current or the former version of the Standards and Criteria.

**ACCREDITATION PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES**

**PLANNING FOR ACCREDITATION**

Nursing education units considering accreditation should contact the ACEN to begin the Candidacy process. As part of this process, nursing education units will be assigned a member of the professional staff as their mentor. The mentoring service is provided to facilitate faculty self-review and planning. The faculty of the program and administrative officers of the governing organization determine when the program is ready to apply for Candidacy and initial evaluation. The decision should be based on an in-depth self-study of the program in relation to the ACEN Standards and Criteria. When the ACEN Commission grants accreditation to a program, all students who graduated during or after the accreditation cycle* during which the site visit was performed will be recognized as graduates of an accredited nursing program.

*Fall Cycle: July 1 to December 31
Spring Cycle: January 1 to June 30

**CANDIDACY PROCESS**

A nursing education unit seeking initial accreditation must apply for Candidacy. Candidate status is granted after an ACEN professional staff review of a nursing program's potential to achieve ACEN accreditation. Programs must provide evidence of current State Board of Nursing approval and the governing organization's accreditation/approval status (where appropriate).

A program seeking accreditation completes an application for Candidacy including paying the required fee. Candidate status does not guarantee that a program will achieve initial accreditation.

Programs that have achieved Candidate status may indicate the following to potential students and interested members of the public:

“This nursing education program is a candidate for accreditation by the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing.”

**Procedure:**

Once eligibility for Candidate status is established in accordance to ACEN Policy #3, programs will be asked to submit information* addressing:

- Faculty academic and experiential qualifications;
- The curriculum/program plan of study;
- Resources to deliver the program;
• The systematic plan of evaluation; and
• Catalog (where appropriate).

All materials submitted are reviewed by the ACEN professional staff. Applicants are notified if approved for Candidate status. A program that has achieved Candidate status must complete the accreditation process within two (2) years.

*Additional information related to the preparation of the Candidacy presentation is available online at www.acenursing.org.

INITIAL ACCREDITATION
A governing organization that offers a program not previously accredited by the Commission initiates the process through its chief executive officer. The chief executive officer of the governing organization for the nursing education unit must authorize the ACEN to conduct the accreditation process by submitting the official authorization form sent from the Commission.

All programs seeking initial accreditation must first apply and be approved as a Candidate for accreditation.

A nursing program may discontinue the initial accreditation process up to twelve (12) weeks prior to the date of the site visit. Changes within twelve (12) weeks of the scheduled site visit will result in the program being responsible for all expenses incurred for the site visit.

CONTINUING ACCREDITATION
Planning for continued accreditation is an ongoing process. A program must be visited and re-evaluated at specified intervals to ensure continuing compliance with the Accreditation Standards and Criteria. The ACEN staff notifies the program of a pending visit approximately one (1) year in advance. Dates for the site visit are scheduled in consultation with the nurse administrator, as the program must be in full operation during the visit.

Official authorization to conduct the ACEN accreditation process is secured from the chief executive officer of the governing organization and the nurse administrator for the nursing education unit. The program will receive an authorization form from the ACEN approximately one (1) year before the visit is to take place.

If the nurse administrator of an ACEN-accredited program chooses to cancel the accreditation process, notification of cancellation must be submitted in writing by the nurse administrator and the chief executive officer of the governing organization to the ACEN CEO. The Board of Commissioners will then take formal action and remove the program from the official listings of ACEN-accredited programs. Any changes made within twelve (12) weeks of a scheduled site visit will result in the program being responsible for all expenses incurred.

If a program is notified about its need to comply with a Commission action and does not respond, the program will be removed from the official listings of ACEN-accredited programs by the Commission at its next scheduled meeting.
EVALUATION PROCESS
The ACEN accreditation process includes the following:
- Candidacy (for programs seeking initial accreditation)
- Program preparation of the Self-Study Report
- Team site visit for program evaluation by program specific site visitors
- Site Visitors' Report
- Staff review
- Evaluation Review Panel with program-specific expertise
- Staff review and referral to the Commission
- Commission accreditation decision
- Appeal panel (when appropriate)

The ACEN process for the evaluation of nursing education programs is a comprehensive four-step process with the program self-review and Self-Study Report as the first step. The second step is the site visit conducted by peer evaluators resulting in the Site Visitors' Report. In the third step, a peer Evaluation Review Panel examines the reports written by and about the program (Self-Study Report and Site Visitors' Report). The final step is a review of the process and the decision on accreditation status by the ACEN Board of Commissioners.

STAFF ASSISTANCE
The ACEN professional staff is available to assist a program preparing for an accreditation visit.

Self-Study Forums are offered annually to provide information about the accreditation processes and details regarding the preparation of the Self-Study Report. All programs seeking initial accreditation are expected to attend a Forum; however, the Forums are available to anyone planning an accreditation review. Dates and locations are posted on the ACEN website (www.acenursing.org).

Programs applying for initial accreditation will be assigned an ACEN professional staff member as a mentor once they have begun the Candidacy process.

SELF-REVIEW AND SELF-STUDY REPORT
Any program applying for accreditation must prepare a Self-Study Report to demonstrate the extent to which the program meets the ACEN Accreditation Standards and Criteria.

The process of self-study represents the combined effort of the governing organization administrators, nursing education unit administrators, faculty, staff, students, and other individuals concerned with the nursing program. All those associated with the program should participate in the self-study process. Broad participation leads to an understanding of the total program.
The Self-Study Report is the primary document used by the site visit team, the Evaluation Review Panels, and the Board of Commissioners to understand the nursing program.

- The report must be based on the ACEN Accreditation Standards and Criteria in effect at the time of the review and the most recent edition of the *ACEN Accreditation Manual*. Accreditation Standards and Criteria become effective on the Commission approval date. Programs scheduled for review within twelve (12) months of revision of the Standards and Criteria may elect to use the current or the former version of the Standards and Criteria.

- Faculty and administrators are responsible for presenting evidence that clearly indicates how the Standards and Criteria are being met. Members of the site visit team will use the Self-Study Report in preparation for their visit to the program.

*Guidelines for the Preparation of the Self-Study Report are available online at www.acenursing.org.*

**THE SITE VISIT**

The purpose of the accreditation visit is to evaluate the nursing education unit by clarifying, verifying, and amplifying program materials as presented in the Self-Study Report. Based on these data, the site visit team will make a recommendation relative to the accreditation status of the program(s).

The visit is an essential part of the accreditation process. It gives the school an opportunity to demonstrate and highlight information presented in the Self-Study Report and provides for interaction among all concerned: administrators, faculty, students, staff, and site visitors. In addition, the onsite visit allows site visitors an opportunity to see the nursing program first-hand. The site visitors verify congruence between the Self-Study Report and the actual practices of the program so that the members of the Evaluation Review Panel and Commissioners have a clear and complete understanding of the program.

**Multiple Nursing Programs Within a Nursing Education Unit**

The ACEN encourages nursing education units offering more than one type of program (i.e., clinical doctorate, master’s, baccalaureate, associate, diploma, and practical) to request that all programs be reviewed for accreditation at the same time. The nursing education unit will prepare one (1) Self-Study Report. The ACEN professional staff will work with the nurse administrator to establish one (1) visit team whose recommendations for each program’s accreditation status will be reviewed by the appropriate Evaluation Review Panel.

**Collaborative and Coordinated Site Visits With Other Agencies**

The ACEN welcomes the opportunity to cooperate with other accreditation and approval-granting agencies. The goal is to increase efficiency and decrease faculty workload while maximizing outcomes. Two (2) options are available: the Coordinated and the Collaborative Visit.
To arrange either a Collaborative or Coordinated Visit, the nurse administrator initiates the process by submitting a request to the ACEN. The staff then works with the nursing education unit to achieve their goal.

**Collaborative Visit**

The Collaborative Site Visit involves the establishment of one (1) site visit team that incorporates representatives from the ACEN and the other accreditation or approval agency. Using the standards and criteria from both agencies, the program prepares one (1) Self-Study Report. A single agenda is established for the visit. At the conclusion of the site visit, the representatives of each agency on the visit team write individual reports that assess compliance with their respective standards and criteria or regulations.

**Coordinated Visit**

The program prepares materials separately for each agency team. The two (2) teams share an agenda and conduct a site visit that meets each agency's requirements. However, the representative from another agency is not a member of the ACEN site visit team. The ACEN team and the other representative may participate jointly in such activities as conferences with faculty, students, and other groups. Many of the activities of the ACEN team and the representative will be carried out separately as the purposes of ACEN accreditation may differ from those of other accrediting/approval bodies. At the conclusion of the visit, each visit team develops a report that assesses compliance with its standards and criteria or regulations.

**Length of Visit**

Accreditation visits are typically scheduled for a minimum of three (3) days. However, the length depends on several factors, including size and complexity of the nursing education unit, geographical locations of the various resources used for student learning experiences, the number of nursing programs involved, and coordination of the visit with other agencies. Correspondences from the ACEN will indicate the inclusive dates of the visit.

**Assignment of Site Visit Team**

Each site visit is conducted by a team of nursing educators with program-specific expertise and at least one clinician. A site visit team for review of a single program typically has a minimum of three (3) members. When multiple programs are reviewed during a visit, the size of the team is adjusted to fit the review needs. In addition, graduate programs offering advanced practice nursing options will have at least one (1) team member with current advanced practice certification.

The ACEN staff will select a team and notify the nurse administrator in advance of the visit. The nurse administrator is invited to contact ACEN staff if a possible conflict of interest is identified among team members. If a team member becomes ineligible or unable to serve, another site visitor with comparable qualifications will be appointed.
The ACEN staff will assign site visitors considering their expertise with multiple program factors including but not limited to:

- Program type(s)
- Size of program and governing organization
- Method(s) of program delivery
- Carnegie classification
- Setting (urban, suburban, and rural)
- State
- Governance of the governing organization (public, private, and religious affiliation, etc.)

The evaluation team is made up of three (3) or more members, depending on the complexity of the setting and/or the diversity of educational programs to be visited. A member is designated as chairperson of the team.

**Team Chairperson**

A site visitor is eligible to be a team chairperson for an accreditation visit once she/he has served in the role of team member a minimum of three (3) times.

**Responsibilities of the Team Chairperson**

The team chairperson assumes the following responsibilities:

- Acts as official spokesperson for the team
- Reviews all content of the ACEN accreditation information packet upon receipt
- Coordinates the planning with the team members
- Conducts the team orientation session and subsequent team meetings and conferences
- Receives and reviews the electronic files from the nurse administrator listing information on all individuals and groups interviewed by the team and all documents reviewed in the “display room”
- Allocates responsibilities for various activities to ensure optimum utilization of team members and adequate coverage of all areas during the visit, including interviews and conferences with key personnel on and off campus
- Requests additional information as necessary
- Notifies the nurse administrator of the arrival of the team and plans the time for the first meeting
- Conducts periodic conferences with the nurse administrator
- Arranges for the exit meeting with the nurse administrator and any persons the nurse administrator invites to be present
- Collates and edits the Site Visitors’ Report to assure completeness and clarity
- Sends the completed Site Visitors’ Report (electronically) to the ACEN within one (1) week following the site visit
- Is available for telephone contact by the Evaluation Review Panel at the time of the program’s review
- Assumes the additional responsibilities stated under “Responsibilities of the Team Members”
Responsibilities of the Team Members

The team member assumes the following responsibilities:

When the ACEN accreditation information packet is received:
- Reviews all content of the packet

When the materials from the school are received:
- Reviews the Self-Study Report prior to arriving at the school
- Notes areas that need clarification or amplification
- Develops a plan for verification

Upon arrival at the site:
- Assumes responsibility to collect data cooperatively and make observations
- Contributes to the content and participates in the writing of the Site Visitors’ Report
- Participates in the exit meeting with the nurse administrator and any persons invited to be present

After the visit:
- Retains a copy of the Self-Study Report, Catalog, Site Visitors’ Report, and any other resource materials used/developed during the site visit until the Commission’s decision is finalized
- Reviews materials in preparation for contact by the Evaluation Review Panel
- Is available for telephone contact by the Evaluation Review Panel at the time of the program’s review

Responsibilities of the Nursing Education Unit

- Provides the team chair with an electronic file that lists the names, credentials, and titles of individuals and group members interviewed by the site visitors on site
- Provides the team chair with an electronic file listing all documents available in the display room by defined category
- Provides computers and printer(s) for the team to use throughout the visit
- Establishes a room in which materials for the site visitors are assembled, where the team can read and work during the period of the visit
- Obtains any necessary written permissions required prior to the visit (e.g., review of records and visits to clinical agencies)
Assembles the following materials in the display room:

- Annual reports to the administration of the governing organization and to the Boards of Nursing
- Budgets
- Class and clinical schedules for the current academic term
- Complete course syllabi, outlines, and materials, including samples of examinations and evaluation forms
- Faculty handbook
- Faculty vitae
- Minutes of faculty and committee meetings for the past two (2) to three (3) years
- Latest accrediting agency report and approval letter for the governing organization
- Results of standardized tests, National Council Licensing Examinations, and/or certification examinations
- Most recent State Board report(s) to the program and approval letter
- Samples of student and faculty projects
- Student handbook
- Clinical agency contracts
- Data/evidence to support the systematic evaluation plan
- Other materials the faculty deems essential to the site visitors' understanding of the nursing education unit and its program(s)

Programs for which all or part of the curriculum is delivered in a language other than English should make provisions for an interpreter to be present throughout the site visit and to make certain that all program documents are available in English for review by the site visitors.

Additional information related to the materials for the display room is available online at www.acenursing.org.

These materials will be used during the visit and left with the nursing education unit upon completion of the visit. Site visitors will ask to review records of faculty, students, and recent graduates. The student records include both academic and financial aid. These records will be reviewed in the offices where they are filed.
Visit Arrangements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Site Visitor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>– Nurse administrator will make hotel reservations for the site visitors and notify the team chair.</td>
<td>– Individual site visitors will pay for the hotel accommodations and be reimbursed by the ACEN.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Each visitor is to have a separate hotel room in close proximity to each other; availability of restaurant facilities is essential.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>– The program is responsible for arrangements for transportation to and from the airport/hotel.</td>
<td>– All persons traveling on ACEN business are expected to use common carriers (economy/coach class or equivalent rates).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Any intra-visit travel expenses and arrangements are also the responsibility of the program.</td>
<td>– Reservations, whether by air, bus, or train, are to be reserved and purchased through the ACEN-designated travel agency at least six (6) weeks in advance of the site visit.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>– A written request to use a personal automobile is required in advance of the visit.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td></td>
<td>– Food during the visit is the responsibility of each site visitor and will be reimbursed by the ACEN after the visit based on current ACEN policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fees</td>
<td>– The ACEN will invoice the program according to the prevailing fee schedule prior to the accreditation visit.</td>
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<td>– Payment is expected prior to the visit, or the accreditation visit will be cancelled.</td>
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Agenda for the Visit

At least six (6) weeks prior to the scheduled visit, a tentative agenda for the visit is prepared by the nursing education unit and sent to the site visit team chairperson along with a copy of the class and clinical laboratory schedules and the completed Technology Assessment Form. Activities usually planned to take place during the visit include:

- Preliminary, interim, and closing meetings with the nurse administrator (and assistants)
- Meetings with:
  - faculty
  - administrative officers of the governing organization
  - nursing students
  - the public for third party comments
  - student support service personnel
  - nursing service personnel (as appropriate)
• Visits to:
  o appropriate facilities and resources
  o selected clinical agencies to observe and meet with students
• Review of:
  o curricular and other materials prepared by the faculty
  o appropriate records of faculty, students, and recent graduates
  o additional data to clarify and amplify the self-study
• Classroom and clinical observations.

Visiting Off-Site Location(s) of the Nursing Program
Prior to the visit, programs with off-site locations must discuss with the site visit team chairperson alternative methods for the visiting team to evaluate additional locations on which the program is offered. If locations are more than one (1) hour apart in driving distance, the nurse administrator should communicate with the ACEN professional staff regarding visits to the additional locations.

THE SITE VISITORS’ REPORT
The visit team chairperson is responsible for presenting an accurate, complete, and well-organized report to the ACEN one (1) week after the conclusion of the site visit. Team members will provide the chairperson with comments and draft sections of the report.

Additional information related to the preparation of the Site Visitors’ Report is available online for site visitors at www.acenursing.org.

ACEN Staff Review
All Site Visitors’ Reports are reviewed by the ACEN professional staff. If questions arise, the team chairperson is contacted for clarification.

A draft copy of the report is mailed to the nurse administrator of the nursing education unit for review and correction of "errors of fact" within eight (8) weeks after the conclusion of the site visit. The completed original Response Form must be received by the ACEN within two (2) weeks after the nursing education unit receives the draft report. Substantive comments are shared with the team chairperson who then decides whether the report is to be changed. The corrected final report will become part of the permanent materials relating to the accreditation visit, as will the Response Form submitted by the nurse administrator.

The final report will be sent to the nurse administrator and the site visit team members prior to the Evaluation Review Panel meeting.

EVALUATION REVIEW PANEL
The peer Evaluation Review Panel (ERP) is appointed by the ACEN Board of Commissioners. The role of the ERP is to assure that the process of peer evaluation has been carried out according to the Accreditation Standards and Criteria. The panelists
review the findings of the visit team as presented in the Site Visitors’ Report compared to the program self-study and catalog and make a recommendation for accreditation status to the Commission.

The role of the Evaluation Review Panel is to validate the work of the site visitors and extend it by noting points of agreement and raising any questions where disagreement or a lack of clarity exists. In the latter case, site visitors are available by telephone during panel deliberations and may enter into discussion with the panel to assure an accurate understanding of the Site Visitors’ Report. The aim is to promote a seamless review that has integrity and does justice to the program under review. The role of the professional staff is to facilitate the work of both review groups.

Panelists do not conduct a de novo review of the program(s). Rather, they determine the adequacy of the evidence to support each standard and criterion. The purpose is to see that the ACEN Standards and Criteria are applied consistently across all programs reviewed by the panel. Finally, they make a recommendation to the Commission on the accreditation status of each program.

Additional information about the roles and responsibilities of the Evaluation Review Panelists are available online at www.acenursing.org.

Nursing Program Representative Attendance at the Evaluation Review Panel Meeting
The nurse administrator and one (1) additional program representative may attend the deliberations of the Evaluation Review Panel about the program in person or by telephone conference. The attendees are observers during the presentation of the program, panel deliberations, and vote; attendees will not be asked to respond to questions or to clarify information. No documents relative to developments occurring after the site visit may be used during the deliberations. At the conclusion of the panel deliberations, the nurse administrator is invited to address the Evaluation Review Panel.

COMMISSION
The Commission has the sole authority to determine the accreditation status of applicant programs. Composed of experts in nursing education, nursing service, and public members, the Commission bases its decisions on the complete and consistent application of the Accreditation Standards and Criteria within and across program types. The full Commission makes the final accreditation decision at its next regularly scheduled meeting. To assist the nursing program in future planning, a copy of the Summary of Deliberations of the Evaluation Review Panel is forwarded to the program along with the Commission decision letter. In all cases, applicants will be given the rationale for any decision. In cases where accreditation is denied, applicants have the opportunity to present their case in a full and impartial hearing before an independent Appeal Panel.
PROGRAM EVALUATORS

Program evaluators are site visitors, members of the Evaluation Review Panel, and members of the Appeal Panel. They make recommendations to the Board of Commissioners. Program evaluators are knowledgeable about the current thinking within the various program types, appropriate curricula, conventions and current trends in healthcare, nursing education, and/or nursing practice.

Eligibility for Selection as a Program Evaluator

In order to be eligible as an ACEN Program Evaluator, the individual must satisfy the following requirements:

**Academic Credentials:**
- **Clinical Doctorate Programs**: Earned doctoral degree from a regionally accredited College/University and a Master's degree with a major in nursing
- **Master's Degree Programs**: Earned doctoral degree from a regionally accredited College/University and a Master's degree with a major in nursing
- **Baccalaureate Degree Programs**: Earned doctoral degree from a regionally accredited College/University and a Master's degree with a major in nursing
- **Associate Degree Programs**: Master's degree with a major in nursing
- **Diploma Programs**: Master's degree with a major in nursing
- **Practical Programs**: Master's degree with a major in nursing
- **Nurse Clinician**: Master's degree with a major in nursing

**Experience:**
- **Nurse Educator**: Full-time faculty appointment or administrator in an ACEN-accredited program*
- **Nurse Clinician**: Clinical appointment in nursing practice

**Knowledge of:**
- Postsecondary and/or higher education
- Curriculum and instruction
- Current issues in nursing education and practice
- Philosophy and processes of specialized accreditation
- Distance education modalities

**Expertise in:**
- Communication
- Group dynamics
- Information literacy
- Management
- Professional practice
Contributions in:
- Scholarship/research
- Practice
- Community service
- Institutional service
- Professional service

* 1. Program evaluators must be from ACEN-accredited nursing programs.
  2. Current program evaluators who have accepted a part-time faculty or administrative position or who have retired may continue to serve as program evaluators for up to two (2) years.

Site Visitor

Selection
All site visitors are current faculty and/or administrators of ACEN-accredited programs or nurse clinicians and are selected through mechanisms and criteria established by the Commission.

Individuals identified by staff, nominated by a colleague, or self-nominated must submit a letter of interest, current CV/Resume, and a letter of recommendation. After ACEN staff review of submitted materials, selected individuals will be invited to become site visitors and must participate in the program evaluator professional development offered by the ACEN.

Appointment
Site visitors are eligible to serve for an indefinite period of time if they receive ongoing positive site visit performance evaluations and remain current with the accreditation process. Visitors remain current by attendance at the Program Evaluator Forums and regular participation in ACEN accreditation activities.

Continuing Eligibility
A site visitor who:
- retires may continue to serve up to two (2) additional years if she/he remains current in nursing education and the accreditation processes.
- is no longer affiliated with a nursing education program or nursing service will be ineligible to continue as a site visitor.
- accepts a position in a nursing program not accredited by the ACEN will be ineligible to continue as a site visitor.

Evaluation
Site visitors are evaluated by the members of the site visit team and the nursing education unit following each site visit.
Preparation
In order to ensure consistency in the application of the Accreditation Standards and Criteria, site visitors are expected to participate (at a minimum) once every four years in the program evaluator professional development offered by the ACEN.

Briefing sessions are conducted by telephone conference call for all site visitors prior to the assigned visit each accreditation cycle.

Honorarium
An honorarium will be provided to the site visitor after a visit is completed.

**Evaluation Review Panel Member**

**Selection**
Members of the Evaluation Review Panel and alternate members are program-specific and appointed by the ACEN Board of Commissioners. The ACEN professional staff reviews candidates based on information from current members of the Evaluation Review Panel, site visitors, Commissioners, and accredited programs and recommends their names to the Commission. Members of the ERP and alternate members must be current site visitors from ACEN-accredited programs.

**Appointment**
Members of the Evaluation Review Panel serve for a three-year term and may be appointed to a second consecutive term. Alternate members of the ERP may serve indefinitely. Panel vacancies are filled by program-specific evaluators selected from the list of alternate members. A member of the ERP who retires may serve out the existing term but will not be eligible for reappointment.

Preparation
Members of the Evaluation Review Panel are expected to participate in the program evaluator professional development offered by the ACEN. Prior to each panel meeting, a briefing session is held to orient new panel members and update the continuing panel members.

**Appeal Panel Member**

**Selection**
Members of the Appeal Panel must have knowledge of and experience with the peer-review process. The nurse educator members must be currently active in nursing education. Commissioners cannot serve on the Appeal Panel.

**Appointment**
The Appeal Panel consists of individuals drawn from an ACEN Commission-approved list of the individuals qualified to serve as members of the Appeal Panel.